

## **Planning Application for change of use from Agricultural to Educational Forest School**

**Applicants Business name:** Roots to Branches Forest School CIC

**Company number:** 13415508

**Directors:** Jenna Benson, Lisa Jones, Michelle Gray

**Farm / Land Owner:** Colin Bennett (Lisa Jones Father)

**Site:** Wild Boar Farm, Rawcliffe Rd, St. Michael's-on-Wyre, Preston, PR3 0UH

### **Existing Wild Boar Farm**

The proposed site is a 1 acre plot within the curtilage of an existing fully operational farm. The whole of the farm, in excess of 150 acres is fully owned by Colin Bennett, the father of one of the Applicants Directors.

This proposal is to change the use of this designated 1 acre plot of farmland into a Forest School for educational and well-being purposes.

Refer to the Existing Site Location Plan 3202.101 that shows part of the Farm site, including the existing access of the highway and the main farm buildings/

Refer to the Proposed Site Location Plan 3202.201 that identifies the 1 acre plot edged in blue.

Due to the large size of the existing farm, it is not possible to include the whole of the farm site on one drawing with a red boundary, hence the part site plan submitted.

The current owner of the farm fully supports this proposal and the small diversification of the 1 acre plot.

### **Who will use it?**

Our vision is to create a mini woodland that local families have been part of, to create, to help maintain it, protect and nurture it into an established mini woodland for play, growing and learning..

Forest School is open to families in the local community but we also want to create sessions for under privileged children who may not have good access to outdoor play. As a CIC company we are hoping to source funding to work in partnership with local Youth Groups, to offer free sessions for families to come along, grow vegetables, learn to cook nutritious meals on a fire, eat together, play together, spend quality time together and connect with nature.

### **What is Forest School?**

Forest school is a unique, outdoor experience that offers all learners the chance to develop their self-esteem, independence, emotional, resilience, co-operation, personal responsibility, autonomy and motivation, as well as a respect for our environment and each other. Participants learn how to look after nature, why nature is important and receive the positive benefits of nature.

Roots to Branches encourages learner-led, play-centred, holistic and experiential adventures. When taking part in our forest school programme a participant is engaging with nature in wild spaces in an exploratory, sensory and physical way.

Forest school offers learning at a natural, relaxed pace using natural resources and imaginations.

### **Benefits of Forest School**

Forest school offers learning at a natural, relaxed pace using natural resources and imaginations.

Promotes healthy living and well-being

Develops confidence, Independence and social skills.

Teaches children about nature and how they can protect it.

Improves co-ordination

Helps children work through practical problems and challenges. This in turn helps them to develop confidence in decision making and take achievable risks.

Encourages children to get a complete sensory approach to the forest and learning through being dressed for all occasions and weather.

Builds resilience

Fresh air and Vitamin D

Improves listening and understanding skills

Improves fine and gross motor skills

Increased stamina

Relaxing

Builds confidence

### **Parking:**



The above pictures are the private driveway to the meadow and the farm yard. These are shown on the Proposed Site Plan Drawing 3202.201, edged in green.

There are 2 parking places next to the meadow which is for disabled parking and any parents, grandparents who require close parking. We have one mum heavily pregnant who benefits from the close parking.

The farmyard provides off road parking for 20 cars. The farmer is happy for us to use the farmyard on days we are open. No cars are allowed to park on the driveway or block the driveway in any way.

Warning and directional signage is put up during sessions to advise vehicles to keep to a mandatory 10mph across the whole site, due to parents and children possibly walking down the lane to from the farmyard to the Forest School. There is enough grass verge to keep off the driveway if a car does come along. There is a passing place half way down the drive.

As the session has a start time and finish time all cars come at the same time and leave at the same time, there is no continuous flow of traffic in and out.

### **Proposed Usage:**

The site at present has been used on a Friday morning 10am-11.30am for a toddler group and more recently on a Wednesday morning for mum and Baby group 10am-11.30am. Within the current 56 days of use guidance (increased to 56 days in 2021 due to covid) We are aware its usually 28 days.

We only take pre-booked visitors and all bookings are made on our booking site. A confirmation email contains information on where to park, to leave no trace and to respect it's a working farm and to stay out of the farm buildings.

Forest School is currently open as a toddler group and a mums and babies group.

The toddler group encourages children to be active outdoors, take risks in a controlled, risk assessed environment. We have fires and use tools with children but only when we are happy that the children are ready and only with adult supervision and when a Forest School leader is present. There has been lots of positive feedback so far with our toddler groups and regular customers have signed up for the sessions.

The mums and babies group is for mums to come along and just 'be' with their baby. It focuses on mums well-being and creates connecting and bonding time with baby. We would like to source funding to be able to create a safe space for mums with PND.

### **Out of Season Use - Grazing**

We don't operate Forest School during the winter months so the last 2 weeks of December, January and the first 2 weeks of February we will be closed and the farmer intends to graze his sheep in the meadow. We have a good working relationship with the farmer.

### **Access:**

The 1 acre field has one pedestrian access gate from the access road and 2 vehicle access gates for farm vehicles and emergency vehicles should anyone need urgent medical attention.

### **Toilet:**

We have one toilet block made from fence panels and a bark chip floor. It is a temporary structure. It is a composting toilet using shavings. All waste is put into an on-site composter.

We have a portable sink with access to soap and water, which we bring in a container. There is no mains water to the site.

Due to our small numbers of visitors, we have found one toilet to be enough but we can add an additional one if necessary.



### **Bell Tent**

The bell tent is situated in the meadow to provide shelter for the little ones when the weather isn't kind to us. Inside is a selection of toys, books, blankets and cushions. It is well used and has been a great addition to the meadow.

We have babies come along to sessions and provides a private and comfortable space for mums to breast feed and keeps babies dry when it's raining.

The tent is sited directly on the grass so can be moved and stored in winter.



## Structures

For the avoidance of doubt, there will be no permanent structures erected on the site as part of this development.

## Wildlife

With careful landscape management and habitat creation we hope to increase the biodiversity within the meadow.

Our ethos is to preserve and enhance biodiversity and we are going to achieve both through the sensitive management of existing habitats - like hedgerows and grasslands - as well as through the creation of new habitats, such as tree, scrub and hedgerow planting, and minibeast hotel/logpile area. We have already added new habitats like a minibeast hotel, dead wood log pile and a brash pile in hope of attracting different kinds of wildlife.



The existing meadow can be managed to make it more biodiverse by planting more diverse species of tree and native woodland plants, installing bird, bat and hedgehog boxes, and managing invasive species which suppress native plants.

We have installed a bird feeder and a bird watching area which the children help to feed the birds and we have started to see an increase in the amount of birds to the meadow.



### **Trees and hedges**

We have started to plant a few trees in the meadow but our vision is to plant trees and a new hedgerow down the new fence line across the meadow. We have applied with the woodland trust and been accepted for 226 trees and hedges to create a mini woodland to attract wildlife and create a space for children and adults to use, connect and learn about nature. We would like families to be involved with the tree planting and have connections with the head of woodland management at Myerscough College who is going to advise on the planting of the tree for maximum benefit to wildlife and the environment.

These 2 photos show the main areas for tree and hedge planting. A few small trees have gone in already.



### **Bees**

Our hope is to have a bee hive in the bottom corner of the meadow. We have contacts with a couple of bee keepers who are going to help me set up a bee hive and maintain it. Again, this is something we would like families to be involved in and learn about as bees are so important and vital for the preservation of ecological balance and biodiversity in nature.

### **Wildflowers**

This year we started a small wildflower patch with the children. This is something we will add to, to increase the wildflower presence in the meadow and attract more wildlife and help the bees with pollination.

### **Shed.**

We were gifted the shed and we use it as a storage and food preparation area. It isn't a permanent structure and has a bark chip floor. The shed has no permanent footings and is sited directly on the field.

At each session we provide fresh drinking water and boiled water along with tea bags, coffee and herbal teas, so participants can help themselves to drinks when they need one. This is all in the shed.



### Fire Circle

We have created a fire circle within the meadow and put posts in to support a tarp shelter in case of wet weather. It is here children will learn how to light fires safely, what wood to burn, how to cook on fires and how to put fires out and the importance of doing so in a safely and why we put fires out. Increasing their ability to manage risks they may face.





### **Future developments**

With the possibility of funding in the future we hope to install a poly tunnel for the growing of vegetables with local families. We have connections with youth clubs working with underprivileged families who will benefit from this scheme. We will invite them to the meadow on a weekly basis, grow vegetables with them, learn about nature, cook on the fire, take part in risky play, sing, tell stories and create a little community for them to relax, enjoy being outside and connect with nature and each other.

**Directors:** Jenna Benson, Lisa Jones

5<sup>th</sup> January 2022